

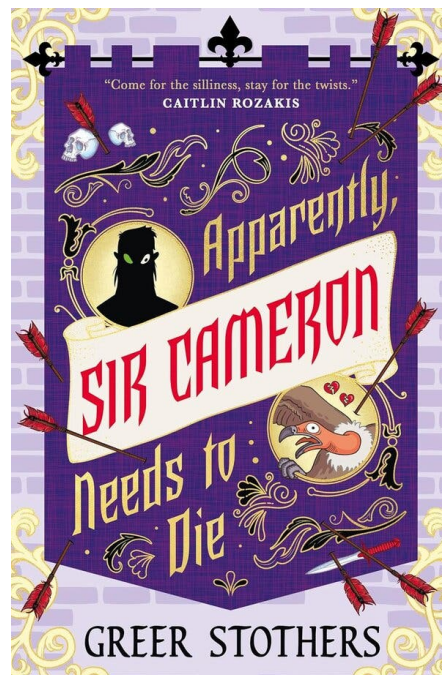
3 Fizzy, Fabulous New Romcoms

Our romance columnist says, “With romcoms, you need to go big or go home.” These novels do just that.

By Olivia Waite

Olivia Waite is the Book Review’s romance fiction columnist. She writes queer historical romance, fantasy and critical essays on the genre’s history and future.

Feb. 20, 2026



Apparently, Sir Cameron Needs to Die

by **Greer Stothers**



With romcoms, you need to go big or go home. One of my most anticipated books of 2026, for the way it clearly goes big, is **APPARENTLY, SIR CAMERON NEEDS TO DIE** (Titan, 384 pp., paperback, \$19.99).

In many romantasies, knights are noble, magic is serious business, villains hoard power and the world gets saved in the nick of time.

You’ll find none of that nonsense here.

Sir Cameron, a handsome knight, shows up late to battles when he can't avoid them — until church elders reveal a prophecy: Sir Cameron's death will lead to the defeat of the mad sorcerer Merulo. Sir Cameron will be sculpted in statues and feted in song for his mandatory sacrifice.

The only person who objects to this is Cameron himself, who promptly flees to — where else? — the mad sorcerer's lair. Because of course, to avoid being defeated, Merulo will need to keep Cameron alive. Our knight is willing to do pretty much anything in exchange: scrubbing pentagrams from floors, dusting forbidden bookshelves, perhaps a little light seduction if the sorcerer is into that.

And that's how our hero gets turned into a vulture, eating rats and squirrels (and the occasional pilfered scone) as Merulo completes the final stages of his evil plan.

It all gets a bit weird — Cameron's growing attraction to the sullen sorcerer, Merulo's blood magic that requires increasingly physical sacrifices (some blood becomes a toe, then a leg), the staggering left turn at the end of the book. But it's goofy and fresh and very, very funny — and, as far as I can tell, nobody makes a single good decision.

True love between a not-too-bright knight and an embittered misanthropic sorcerer may not run smooth, but it is a ton of fun to watch.



Apparently, Sir Cameron Needs to Die

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Honey Bee Mine

by Sarah T. Dubb

Sometimes going big means going deep. If you want a romcom that really puts its characters through the wringer — where the tragedy may be back story, but never destiny — then you'll want Dubb's small-town romance **HONEY BEE MINE** (Gallery, 320 pp., paperback, \$19).

The framework is familiar: the beekeeper Penny Becker (the good girl), the big-city restaurateur Zander Bouras (the bad boy) and a Honey Festival that needs to succeed or Penny will lose the family farm.

Zander's just back to sell the house he inherited from his grandfather. He left town once with his high school sweetheart, and now that they're divorced, he is ready to leave Sullivan's Glen behind forever. He resents the way the people here expect him to be his worst, most rebellious self. His grandfather always held up Penny as the perfect example of good behavior, so what better way for Zander to prove he's matured than by helping Penny's festival succeed? But Penny is the third generation of Becker women to be left by unreliable men, so she's naturally worried by his offer.

Rarely do small-town romances feel as textured as this. There's plenty of charm in the family farm and the exquisitely described beehives, but there's also the pervasive sense of claustrophobia caused by everyone already knowing your worst teenage mistakes and judging you accordingly. It's romantic without being overly romanticized, and the characters are just as three-dimensional.



Honey Bee Mine

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Only Friends



by Lydia San Andres

And then sometimes you want a sweet, fizzy romp of a romcom. San Andres makes the move from witty historicals to modern contemporary romance with **ONLY FRIENDS (Primerio Sueno Press, 288 pp., paperback, \$18)**, the story of an aspiring screenwriter in need of focus and a Regency cosplayer with nothing but good looks and an OnlyFans account.

Dashwood — Dash, for short — is a sweetheart of a hero, with a savior complex and a yearning to be seen as more than a pretty face. Mariel is messy, impulsive, too loud, too much; she tends to bolt at any whiff of real emotion. When Mariel asks if Dash would be interested in making spicy Regency videos — her scripts, his smiles, a winning combination — she expects it to be a purely professional relationship.

But writing together leads to bantering, which leads to long walks around New York in the summer — a place of monstrous humidity, unspeakable smells and endless food options — which leads to, well, you can guess what. San Andres knows that a city, even such a vast one, is really a bunch of small towns tied together by chains of coincidence and habit; watching Mariel entangle herself in both Dash and the whole of New York feeds the ever-present need to find the place where you belong.

It's the perfect shot of summer warmth in the middle of this long, cold winter.



Only Friends

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